



Ministry of
Agriculture

Farm & Food Report

Communications Branch, Walter Scott Building
3085 Albert Street, Regina, Canada, S4S 0B1

Saskatchewan

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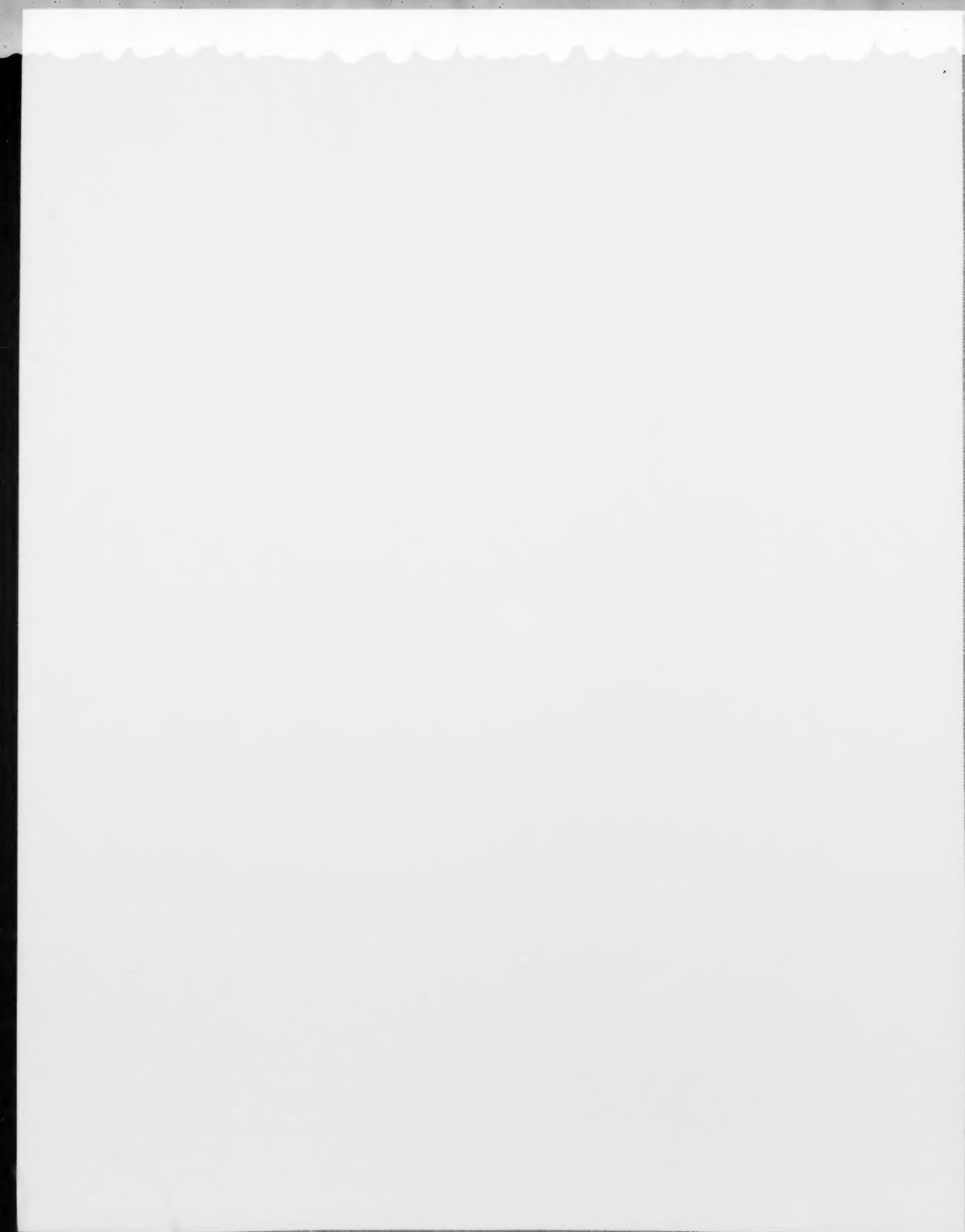
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Log Number: 07-50-212
Week of December 10, 2007

MECHANICAL WEED CONTROL FOR ORGANIC PRODUCERS

"Many organic growers say that mechanical weed control is more like an art than a science. Well, we are trying to find out what the science is behind the art." That is how Agriculture Development Fund (ADF) researcher Dr. Steve Shirliffe sums up some new research into herbicide alternatives.

In 2004, Shirliffe and co-researcher Eric Johnson with Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada set out to explore the tolerance of oat, wheat and barley to mechanical weed control methods. Three years later, the research, funded in part by ADF, provided some interesting results.

Shirliffe, an Associate Professor with the Plant Sciences Department at the University of Saskatchewan, said the research will benefit the growing organic sector.

"Weed control in organic crops is difficult. Mechanical techniques offer some options for farmers. When you use mechanical methods, they tend to be not nearly as selective as an herbicide would be. A lot of these mechanical methods cause crop damage as well as weed damage, so you have to balance it out to make sure that you are not making the matter worse," said Shirliffe.

The research looked at several mechanical techniques, including in-crop harrowing, mowing and rolling. Shirliffe said the biggest surprise had to do with oats.

"At the onset of our research, the thought was – and it was reflected in some production manuals – that post-emergent oat should not be in-crop harrowed. The information at the time suggested that wheat and barley were tolerant to this, but what we found out is that oat is indeed tolerant to it," explained Shirliffe.

It's unclear why in-crop harrowing was previously not recommended for oat.

"We couldn't find any solid evidence, but speculate that because the position of the growing point of oat is closer to the surface, perhaps it was believed there would be damage. Our research showed oat, in fact, was often more tolerant than even wheat, which most people hold up as being a crop that is quite tolerant of in-crop harrowing," said Shirliffe.

The findings provide organic oat producers with another option for weed control which previously was not recommended.

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Another surprise came from the research into rolling flax as a weed control method.

Shirtliffe said the results there were pretty clear.

"We found out that it is probably not a good idea," but, he said, there was some anecdotal evidence that it might be effective.

"The idea was that you roll your flax with a roller that you would use for pulse crop production, and the thinking is that some weeds, like wild mustard, would be broken down by it and not come back, whereas flax with fibre in its stem would come back up and wouldn't be affected. Well, that never happened. It is something that we are not recommending at all. We looked at it for three years in a row at one location and it did not have any potential," said Shirtliffe.

Mowing to control weeds was an equal disappointment.

"We used wheat, oat and barley in the test, mowing them at different stages. The thinking was that the crop would come back quicker than the weeds – giving it a competitive advantage. In the end, we just didn't see any positive yield response or weed control benefit that would indicate that it is a practice that we would ever recommend," said Shirtliffe.

However, rotary hoeing did yield some positive results.

"My partner Eric Johnson looked at rotary hoeing. It looks like it might have some promise for organic growers – using a minimum-till rotary hoe. It is an implement we are not very familiar with in Western Canada, but it is used in the corn and soy bean belt. Multiple passes with a rotary hoe when the weeds are small is effective at killing some weeds, and there is quite good crop tolerance as well," said Shirtliffe.

While this research will benefit organic producers the most, Shirtliffe points out mechanical weed control techniques can also help non-organic producers reduce herbicide use.

A copy of the ADF report, *Mechanical Weed Control for Organic Producers*, project number 20030400, can be obtained by phoning Saskatchewan Agriculture at (306) 787-5929, or downloaded from the Saskatchewan Agriculture website at www.agriculture.gov.sk.ca.

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NOMINATIONS NOW OPEN FOR ROSEMARY DAVIS AWARD

A prestigious national award recognizing outstanding Canadian women in agriculture is now accepting nominations.

The Farm Credit Canada (FCC) Rosemary Davis Award honours women who are active leaders in Canadian agriculture. FCC said these are women who give of themselves in their communities or beyond – producers, veterinarians, teachers, researchers, agribusiness operators and more.

“The award is intended to promote agriculture as a viable career option for women, and to highlight the contributions that women have made over the years to the agricultural industry,” said Edward Mulrooney, FCC Project Manager for the Rosemary Davis Award.

The distinction will be bestowed upon five women from across Canada, who will each receive an all-expenses paid trip to “Dialogue and Discovery,” the Simmons School of Management premier leadership conference for women, being held May 3, 2008, in Boston.

The award is named after the first female board chair of FCC, herself a successful agribusiness owner and operator. Davis was first appointed to the FCC board of directors in 1995, and served as chair from 2000 to 2006.

Mulrooney said that candidates for the award are judged on a variety of criteria.

“Do they demonstrate leadership? Do they give back to their communities and to Canadian agriculture? Do they show a passion for agriculture? Do they have a vision for the future of agriculture? These are the kinds of qualities we look to celebrate in our award recipients,” said Mulrooney.

To be eligible, nominees must be at least 21 years of age and actively involved in the agricultural sector in some manner. Candidates may submit their own names for consideration or be nominated by someone else who believes they are well-suited for the distinction.

“People can nominate themselves or someone they feel is deserving of the award. People often don’t feel comfortable putting their own name forward because they feel like they’re bragging, or they don’t feel they deserve an award,” Mulrooney said. “So other people can nominate their friends, sisters, mothers or any other women who really work hard towards building the industry.”

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Application forms and instructions can be found at www.FCCRosemaryDavisAward.ca. The deadline for online applications is January 21, 2008. Recipients will be notified sometime around mid-March.

Anyone with further questions about the award or the application procedure can visit the award's website or contact FCC at 1-888-332-3301.

Headquartered in Regina, FCC is Canada's largest provider of business and financial services to farms and agribusinesses through a network of 100 offices located primarily in rural Canada.

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PULSE CROP DEVELOPMENT WORKSHOPS COMING UP

The 2008 Pulse Development Workshop schedule has been announced. The workshops will be held in Swift Current on February 5, Moose Jaw on February 6 and Weyburn on February 7, 2008.

"These annual workshops make information more readily accessible to southern Saskatchewan producers for the development of the pulse industry," said Elaine Moats, Crop Development Specialist with Saskatchewan Agriculture.

The pulse industry partners involved in the workshops include Saskatchewan Agriculture, the Saskatchewan Pulse Growers, the University of Saskatchewan, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada and many private companies involved in basic and applied research, as well as processing, handling and marketing of pulse crops and the biological and chemical product sectors.

"These workshops have developed a reputation as a strong program," said Elaine Moats. "They provide information on new developments affecting pulse crops and the pulse industry directly to producers and other industry players."

Each workshop will run from 9:00 a.m. to 3:45 p.m. Participants are encouraged to arrive early in order to complete registration, to allow time to network with producers and the speakers, and to visit the industry displays.

The 2008 workshops feature a wide variety of presentations and displays, including: Pulse Market Overview with Brian Clancey of STAT Communications Ltd.; Foods from the Cradle of Civilization with Bert Vandenberg of the University of Saskatchewan; New Agronomy Research presented by Yantai Gan of AAFC; New Pulse Crop Varieties with Bert Vandenberg, Tom Warkentin and Bunyamin Tar'an from the U of S; and Pulse Crop Fertility Needs and Contribution to Rotation with Ken Panchuk of Saskatchewan Agriculture.

In addition, Penny Pearse, provincial plant disease specialist, will be presenting a report on the Ascochyta on Chickpea Sentinel Plan Project, and the Saskatchewan Pulse Growers will provide an update on their activities.

"Saskatchewan's pulse industry has become recognized world-wide," said Moats. "Saskatchewan grows more than 95 per cent of the lentils, over 75 per cent of the peas, and 80 per cent of the chickpeas produced in Canada."

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The Pulse Development Workshops are organized jointly by the staff of Saskatchewan Agriculture and the Saskatchewan Pulse Growers Association.

“Workshops such as these help to build long-lasting relationships between growers, plant breeders, and researchers,” said Moats.

There is a \$15.00 fee for the workshops, payable at the door, which includes lunch and refreshment breaks. Participants are asked to pre-register by calling the ministry’s Agriculture Knowledge Centre at 1-866-457-2377 before February 1, 2008.

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CHRISTMAS TREE FARMS BRING SMILES TO MANY FAMILIES

Santa seems to get all the credit at Christmas time, even though he has many helpers who pitch in to make the season bright. Among them are Saskatchewan's two dozen or so commercial Christmas tree growers, who can spend a decade or more nurturing tiny seedlings into the perfectly shaped conifers that eventually find their way into family rooms around the province.

One such operation is the Come See-Come Saw U-Choose Christmas Tree Farm, located just a few kilometres off the Trans-Canada Highway east of Moose Jaw. Like all commercial growers, the farm's owners, Henri and Aline O'Reilly, work hard all year long preparing for the magical month leading up to the most joyous of family holidays.

"My wife and I both worked in Moose Jaw, and we bought this piece of land in the 1970s hoping to move here after retirement," said Henri O'Reilly. "A number of years ago, we felt we should do something with the land. We used to go down east a lot, because we had some children going to university there. They have a lot of Christmas tree farms there. It sprung into an idea for us, and we thought, 'Yeah, let's try it!'"

The O'Reillys planted their first trees around 20 years ago, and began selling about 10 years ago. Today, Henri estimates they have between 10,000 and 12,000 trees at various stages of growth on 20 acres of land, planted to allow roughly a 10-year rotation.

"When we first started, we planted Scots pine. They probably take about nine or 10 years to grow from a young tree into one that's ready for market," he said. "They make beautiful trees, but the trouble with Scots pine is that they tend to grow a little bit crooked, especially if it's windy – and we all know what Saskatchewan weather is like."

As a result, the O'Reillys are in the process of switching their farm over exclusively to balsam firs, which come from northern Saskatchewan. "Some members of the Saskatchewan Christmas Tree Association are from the north, and they go out and collect balsam fir seedlings, which we purchase from them," he stated. "In about four years, it's all we'll have."

The Come See-Come Saw farm uses a drip irrigation system to make sure the trees get the moisture they need to grow strong and healthy. As a result, dry weather is not a problem. Instead, it's an abundance of precipitation, particularly in the springtime, which can pose a challenge.

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"Wet springs cause the soil to become very soggy, so the roots don't hold well. When the wind blows, it can tilt the trees over, so we have to straighten them out again," said O'Reilly.

"The other big challenge is the deer. We ended up erecting an eight-foot high page wire fence around the property to keep them out," he added.

"The only other problem we sometimes run into is bad, blustery winter weather at selling time that prevents people from coming out to get their trees."

O'Reilly estimates that the most amount of work required on the farm is the tree shearing. Shearing is the process of cutting off the tips of the branches at a certain time of year so that more buds grow along the branch, resulting in a fuller, more shapely tree. For Scots pine, he says growers have about a one-month window from late June to late July to trim. For balsam fir, there is more leeway, and growers can shear right into the fall.

O'Reilly says the best part of the job for him and all other members of the Saskatchewan Christmas Tree Growers Association is the thousands of smiling faces they get to see each and every year.

"It's really more than the tree, it's the whole experience," he stated. "We've had some people who have been coming back now for 10 years. They make an annual family tradition out of it."

Patrons of Come See-Come Saw are given a saw and a hauling sled, and sent out into the plantation to look around at their own pace and find the tree they want. When they return with their tree, Henri uses a shaker to hoist it up and shake any dead needles out to avoid a mess at home, then employs a wrapper to wrap it in netting so it is easier to transport and haul into the house.

"We also have some real live reindeer here, which the kids absolutely love. We have a store where we give the people a complementary cookie and hot chocolate, and they are welcome to purchase any other assorted treats and crafts and jams they might want," O'Reilly said.

The Come See-Come Saw U-Choose Christmas Tree Farm is open seven days a week from November 24 to December 23, from 10:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. every day. For more information on the operation, visit their website at www.comesaw.com or call their info line at (306) 693-9845.

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CORPORATE LEADERSHIP FROM THE HORSE'S MOUTH

Using horses as teachers is the foundation of the program offered at the Beaver Creek Ranch and Horse Centre, located near Lumsden. The ranch provides skills training using an approach called Equine-Assisted Learning.

"Your reaction with the animal is the same in your approach to people," said owner and instructor Brenda Clemens. "We use horses as a barometer to tell what a person's energy is like, and then to help people understand that if they change their approach in handling the situation, it can lead to a better effect."

Clemens and co-instructor Lisa Larsen are both Certified Equine-Assisted Learning Specialists, a designation earned through a course offered at the Cartier Equine Centre in Prince Albert, which is the first of its kind in Canada. The program puts participants in direct contact with the horses on the ranch, and through their interaction, the participants learn how they are being perceived by others.

"Horses are really intuitive," said Clemens. "They are really sensitive to someone who maybe is approaching them under false pretenses, or who isn't authentic."

The focus of the Beaver Creek Ranch and Horse Centre is on providing innovative solutions to enhance team effectiveness in the workplace. Clients are using the centre to help develop leadership skills.

"Horses look for leadership," said Clemens. "So you could be awfully nice to the horse, and pat them, and say please do what I ask, but the horse still won't move. You have to be appropriately assertive. So that becomes a metaphor for the workplace. If you were nice to everybody in the office, would they co-operate? You have to be assertive but you can't be a bully."

The corporate training sessions normally involve two-person teams that work with an individual horse.

"First we explain that we're going to guide the people through the exercises, and, after the exercises, we talk about how they reacted to the horse, how the horse reacted to them, and how they worked as a team," Brenda Clemens explained. "The beauty of it is that it involves you in a real-life situation, rather than a lecture."

Team building takes place as participants work together with their horses to achieve some simple objectives. They are encouraged to do things like unifying their efforts, working as allies and sharing available resources to break down the barriers that can prevent people from working together.

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"All of the exercises are team-oriented, and can be as simple as catching the horse with someone else," said Clemens. "The last exercise will usually involve the whole team, so everyone is in the arena at the same time."

Corporate clients that have used the Beaver Creek facility include the Saskatchewan Communications Network, the law firm McPherson, Leslie and Tyerman, and Athol Murray College at Notre Dame. The equine-assisted learning program provides a bonding experience for the groups, which usually consist of no more than 16 people.

"At the end of the day, we'll have supper, or sit around the campfire and have a round-table discussion about what they think they learned from the horse, and how they can apply those lessons to the workplace," said Clemens.

The Beaver Creek Ranch and Horse Centre also operates a bed-and-breakfast, and holds western-themed group dinners on their property. As well, Brenda Clemens and husband Barry are working ranchers, running about 150 head of cattle.

Complete information on the Beaver Creek Ranch learning programs is available on their website, at www.beavercreekranch.ca.

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